

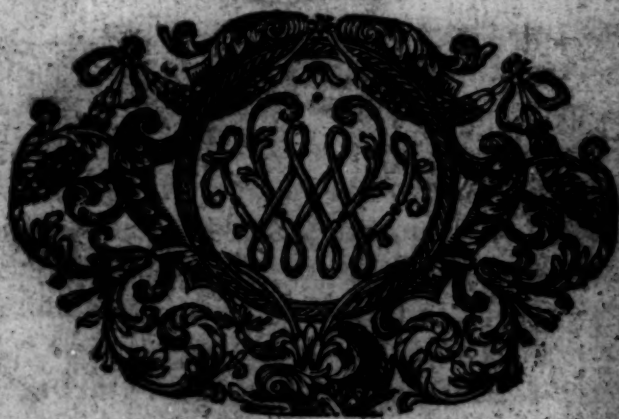
LETTERS
OF ^{4403. 8g.}
RELIGION,

BETWEEN

Theophilus *and* Eugenio.

With parts

PART II.



LONDON:

Printed for J. ROBERTS, in *Warwick-Lane.*

(Price Six-pence.)

1710.

LETTERS

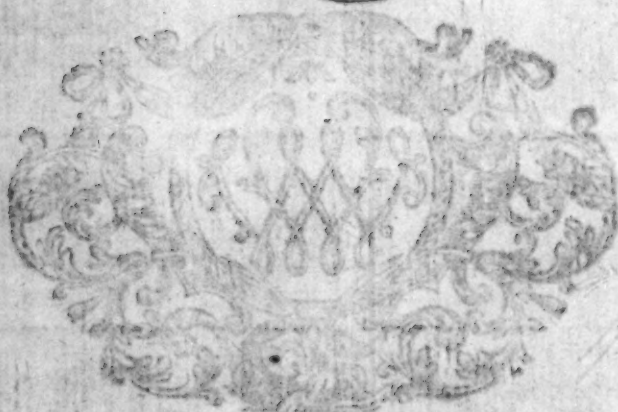
OF

RELIGION

BETWEEN

Theophilus and Eugenius

II.



LONDON:

Printed for J. Rose, at the New-Print-Office, in Warwick-Lane. 1750.
(Price Six-pence.)

The First LETTER.

EUGENIO to THEOPHILUS.

S I R,



U R Religious Correspondence having been discontinued, to my great Disadvantage, for Nine Months, I now look upon it as my Duty to acquaint you with the present State and Scituation, in which I find my self as to my Spiritual Concernments; and as I acknowledge with great Thankfullness your former pious Advice and beneficial Admonitions, so I am oblig'd to crave your

further Assistance. The Letters I receiv'd from you made such good Impressions on my Mind, and warmed my Heart with such devout Passions, that I resolv'd to enter upon a stricter Course of Life, and a more uniform and equal Practice of Vertue; but in a short time I found the Fervour of my Zeal abate, and much Deadness and Indisposition to Religion return'd upon me: Sometimes I hop'd that the heavenly Seed of Piety was really sowed within me, and sometimes I trembled and distrust'd my Sincerity, while I was perplexed with Doubts and Misgivings lest the good Seed was scatter'd on a hard and stony Heart, where it would never take any deep Root, but tho' it seem'd to thrive and flourish for a while, it would by degrees languish and sicken, till at length it wither'd and dyed away. You will see what Reason I have for this melancholly Apprehension, when you have read the following Account of my self. I lately took a serious and deliberate Review of my Actions, and examin'd the Course and Tenour of my Life for these last

Letters of Religion.

Months, and I must confess with Shame and Sorrow that upon balancing the whole, I cannot say that I have in this Time improved my Talents, and made that good use of the Lights you kindly imparted to me, as I hoped I should have done: On the contrary I have Reason to fear that I have lost Ground, and that my good Resolutions yield and give Way, tho' I thankfully acknowledge that I have been protected by Divine Grace from falling into gross and heinous Sins, yet I do not feel those warm Affections, nor taste that Pleasure and Delight in the Practice of Religious Duties, nor that readiness and desire of returning to them, as I formerly experienced. I am more backward to repeat my Devotions, and more cold and lifeless in those Spiritual Performances, and seem pleased in my self when the burdensome Task is over. My Contemplation on Divine Objects, my Attendance on the publick Service of God and the Holy Sacrament, is not accompanied with so much Zeal and inward Satisfaction as I once felt, nor do I find such lively Operations of Christian Love to my Neighbour, nor do I search out Occasions of doing good in dispensing my Charity to the Poor and Needy, and administering Succour and Consolation to the Afflicted and Distrest, with that tender Compassion, and with that Alacrity as I am convinced I ought to do.

It happens that the Gentlemen that dwell about me are for the most part a loose and careless Generation, plung'd in Prophaness and Immorality; among whom a Man of Religion is the standing Jest of the Scoffer, and the Song of the Drunkard: Hunting, Drinking, Rioting and Gaming, are their successive Entertainments; they never have the Worship of God in their Families, nor do they mention his Holy Name but in prophane Oaths, Imprecations, and horrid calling out for Damnation on themselves or others. To reprove these Gentlemen seems to be a casting Pearl before Swine, and to keep them Company without reproving them, is to partake of their Guilt; several of these are my near Relations, who sneer at Religion, and under the Expression of Civility and Friendship discover their Contempt of me, for not conforming my Life to their Ways, secretly laugh at my Reservedness, and despise me for my Fear of God, and unwillingness to undergo his Wrath. When I visit these Gentlemen, which I think I sometimes ought to do, if I carry with me a serious Temper of Mind, I find at my Return I am a Loser by

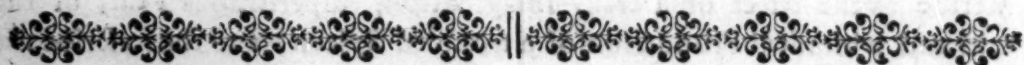
by the Company, while I perceive a flatness and a damp cast upon my serious Disposition. I must own too, but not without Shame, that I cannot with a due Fortitude and unshaken Resolution bear the Reproaches and Scorn that I see thrown on Religion, and often intended against my self, for being such a humourfome and unfashionable Person, as to mind in earnest the great Affairs of another Life. I must acknowledge, I say, that it affects and disturbs me, when I hear them expose all Piety and Vertue as the effect of a crazy Imagination, superstitious Fear, or the odd and whimsical Production of a troubled Spleen; and thus ascribe the Health of the Mind to the Distemper of the Body, and mock Piety of Heart and Purity of Life, which are established on such strong Foundations of right Reason, as will abide the strictest Test and Examination, as a wild Illusion and a melancholy Phantasm. I evidently feel the Conversation of these Gentlemen is injurious to me, and tho' I have not Authority enough to do them Good, their evil Communication has Power to do me much Hurt. There are in my Neighbourhood a few other Gentlemen of a very different, but not a more Religious Taste, who are entirely taken up in eager Pursuits after Riches, and know no other use of their Understandings, but to form Schemes, and lay Designs how to encrease their Money and Possessions. When I converse with these I am not indeed entertain'd with loose and immodest Discourses, nor affronted with Curses, Oaths and Blasphemy; however there is a secret Infection, that arises from the Conversation of these sober Avaricious Men, that changes a serious Temper of Mind, and gives it in a Measure a worldly Turn. I am sensible that my too much frequenting the Conversation of the Men of each Kind has contributed to the weakening of my pious Resolutions, and therefore I have determin'd to contract my Acquaintance, and to make fewer and shorter Visits, being better satisfied to be reproached or pitied as Morose, Odd and Unconversable, than to waste my Time, prejudice my Vertue and disturb my Peace, by complying with a Prophane or Immoral Race of Men, who tho' they call themselves Christians, never speak or act in that Character, but always in defiance and contradiction to it. I likewise have resolved to apply my self, as you have directed, to fervent Devotion and daily Meditation on Divine and Spiritual Subjects; and here it is, Sir, that I entreat your Direction, and if you please, let me know what Methods I should use

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to attain a more prevailing and settled Degree of Piety, and particularly what Subjects of Meditation you would recommend for this Purpose ; by which you will greatly oblige

Your most humble Servant,

EUGENIO.



The Second LETTER.

THEOPHILUS to EUGENIO.

S I R,

SINCE you have express'd an earnest desire that I should carry on the Religious Intercourse begun between us, and that I would farther assist you with such Motives and Directions as may promote your Advancement in Piety, till you become an established and thoroughly confirm'd Christian, I assure you, that you have enjoyed me an agreeable Task.

I know not a more successful Method how to procure prevailing and eminent Degrees of Religion and Vertue, than that of cherishing the Love of God in our Hearts with unwearied Care and Application ; for this being the Principle of Divine Life in the Soul of Man, if it be constantly cultivated and improved by the most effectual Arguments and Incentives, it must needs acquire a stronger Dominion over the Faculties of the Soul and the Appetites of the Body, and produce in our Lives a more steady and regular Succession of good and worthy Actions. For Divine Love being that celestial Habit by which we chuse and adhere to God as our ultimate End and the Object of our Happiness, it must follow that this is the first Mover and the Spring of Pious Operations in our Minds, and of Vertue and Purity in our Practice, which

which are the only means to procure our Fruition of him ; and therefore as this Principle is warm and vigorous, or weak and languishing within, Moral Goodness in the Heart and Life must flourish or decay.

This is the leading and highest Grace that carries the Mind directly to its Supream Felicity, and when all other Vertues are superceded, there being no farther Occasion for their Exercise, this will continue for ever, being the only Habit of the Soul, by which we can enjoy the Divine Being in a future State of Perfection and Happiness ; and therefore it is declared by our Saviour to be the first and greatest Commandment ; and for this Reason I have been determined to lay before you in a practical Manner those Arguments and Considerations that seem to me most conducive to cultivate and strengthen in your Mind the sincere Love of God.

It is a clear and convincing Evidence of the inbred Blindness and Degeneracy of Humane Nature, that the generality of Mankind are mistaken in the Choice of their Happiness ; while having lost their Taste of Spiritual and Divine Pleasures, in the Enjoyment of which their Minds might acquiesce and be fully satisfied, their misguided Imaginations, according to their peculiar Complexions, set up a Variety of Phantoms and empty Appearances, instead of the true Object of Felicity ; Multitudes of Men are captivated with Riches, and believe that a plentiful Estate and great Possessions will make them Happy ; others are enamoured as much with Power, Pomp and Honour, nor is their Number less, who believe that Happiness consists in the Gratifications of their Appetites with diversity of Corporeal Pleasures ; and each of these Classes, given up to a different Delusion, are eager and industrious in the pursuits of those Enjoyments which they flatter themselves will give them Ease and Satisfaction. Thus the Minds of Men being alienated from God, and therefore estranged from the Object of their Happiness, their Bent and Inclination is turn'd aside to their lying Vanities, I mean, Temporal Possessions of different Sorts, in which they terminate their Love and Delight. Thus the Proud and Ambitious Man would fain be Independent and not Subordinate to his Maker, and therefore falls down and worships himself, the great Idol of his Esteem. The Rich and Avaricious deify their Gold, and the Voluptuous make their Belly their God ; for whatever Men chiefly love and value and pursue,

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is in Effect the God they worship ; and 'tis plain, that this is the Case of those I have nam'd. But how idle and absurd are the Hopes and Expectations of these mistaken Persons? Supposing the Avaricious, the Men of Pleasure, and the Proud and Aspiring should possess the different Objects of their Desires, I would ask of them what these Acquisitions can do to make them happy: Can they remove from them any important Evil, or supply the want of any considerable Good? Can Honour, Riches, Power or Pleasure cure the Diseases either of their Bodies or their Minds? Can such Enjoyments relieve their Pain, remove their Sickness, or assuage their Thirst in a burning Fever? Are they able to compose their Inquietude, shut up their wakeful Eyes with refreshing Sleep, and restore Tranquility to their languishing and restless Spirits? Is it in their Power to reduce the swelling Waters of a Dropsy, or to cloath with new Flesh the meagre and emaciated Limbs of one exhausted by a long Consumption? Can they ease the Torments of the Gout or Stone, still the Fury of the Cholick, or new brace the Limbs dissolved and ineebled by a confirmed Palsy? Can they cover the Warriour's Head in the Day of Battle, defend from Dangers that invade by Day, or the pestilential Arrows that fly by Night? When the Possessours shall lie confined by Sickness to their Bed, and strive with the Pangs and Agonies of Death, when their sorrowful Friends stand weeping round them, and Attendants are ready to lay their dead Bodies out, will they cry to their Wealth, Power or Honour, the Idols whom they served, to afford them Courage and Comfort? And will their Gods hear and help them in their Extremity? Will they protect them against the stings of Remorse and the Insults of an awakened enraged Conscience, and give them the Prospect of a happy Eternity? Far from this, on the contrary they will augment their Trouble and exasperate their Grief, when they reflect that now they must part with their dear Satisfaction, without Hopes of enjoying those or any other Pleasures for ever.

NOR have the Profits and Pleasures of this World greater Power to conquer the Diseases of the Mind: Can they subdue our criminal Habits and evil Inclinations, and renew our degenerate Nature, by introducing into the Heart a Principle of Divine Life and predominant Piety? Can they cleanse this corrupt Fountain, that the Streams which

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issue from it may be pure? Are they able to assist us against powerful Temptations, and strengthen and confirm us in the sincere Practice of Religious and moral Duties? Are they able to work in us evangelical Faith and sincere Repentance, reconcile us to our offended Judge, pardon our Sins, and put us in Possession of the Kingdom of Heaven? If they can do nothing of all this, but rather hinder our Happiness in every one of these Instances; if, I say, they can remove from us no great Calamity, nor procure us any necessary or valuable Benefit, is it not amazing, that the far greatest part of Mankind should pursue with eagerness Things which can do so little for them, and which rather obstruct than promote their Felicity?

BUT now if we turn our Thoughts to our blest Creatour, we shall soon be convinced that he, and he alone, can be our chief Beatifick End. For since he is posselt of all possible Perfection, it is in his Power to remove from us all the Evils, and bestow upon us all the Blessings before enumerated. He has boundless Goodness, that can fill all the Capacities of the Soul, and fully satisfy all our Desires, that tend to our Happiness. He is Almighty, and therefore able, he is essential Love, and therefore willing, to do us the utmost Good. He is Eternal and Immutable, and therefore a constant and unchangeable, as well as a suitable and adequate Good to a reasonable Creature. Here, Sir, behold your Happiness, which consists in the Enjoyment of the Divine Being by the most raised Love, Admiration, Complacency and Delight in the Purity and Perfection of your Nature. This is the Blessedness of Heaven, that is, all the Goodness that the Faculties and Powers of your Mind are capable of receiving; and you approach the nearer to this State of Glorification or consummate Bliss, the more you advance in your esteem, and are fix'd in the choice of God as your chief End, and in those Divine and Religious Habits, which as they are the only Felicity, so are they the necessary Qualifications, that prepare and fit you for the Possession of it.

AND now, Sir, to excite your Love to God, and kindle a Divine Flame to an Object so perfectly amiable, give me leave to expostulate with you, and set before you the following Considerations.

WHEN you are accustomed to exercise your unprejudiced Reason, and impartially contemplate the Perfections of the Divine Being, your

Creator, Benefactor and Indulgent Father, and who alone is capable of making you happy, you will soon adhere to him with the most inflamed Desire, as to your final Felicity; did you meditate frequently and seriously on this Eternal Good, these infinite and irresistible Charms, and look stedfastly and constantly on this Glorious Object, you would feel its Divine Influence and attractive Force, till you were ravished with the Prospect, and carryed to its Embraces with ardent Inclinations. You would wish that the Divine Flame would spread itself thro' your Heart, and make it rise a burning Sacrifice towards Heaven; you would find Divine Love would as a vital Principle animate all the Powers and Faculties of your Soul, and be as sensible that you loved the blest Creator, as that you love Health, Friends, Ease and Life itself; nor would you desire any other Happiness than the Perfection of this Celestial Quality; for the acquiring of which you would be contented to part with all your worldly Possessions, become the poorest and most despised Creature upon the Earth. To enjoy this Felicity you would chuse to live in Hunger, Thirst and Nakedness, to be condemned to Chains, to the Mines or the Gallies; and for the Attainment of it, you would not be unwilling to resign your Life and all the Enjoyments of this World; Riches, Honour and the Pleasures of Sense would be so far from being first in your Esteem your main Happiness, that in your deliberate Thoughts you would be more afraid of those Possessions, in a great Degree, than of Poverty and Contempt themselves.

IN vain the World would open its worthless Toys and empty Pride before you, or tempt you with the low and transient Delights of Sense. A pious Mind, acquainted with Divine Love, will be ready to say, what are these idle and impertinent Things to me, who in a short Time must certainly Die, and has every Hour in prospect a vast Eternity? What Reason have I to value this World more than the Dead or the Dying do? But if I was sure to continue here many Ages, I am past doubt here is nothing to be found that will satisfy and ease my Desires. Since therefore the Divine Being is the only Good, that is commensurate to my Wishes, and can afford my Soul a Compleat Satisfaction, and since he invites me and makes it my indispensable Duty to love and enjoy him, why does not my Heart burn within me, and why do I delay to embrace my Felicity, since I have certainly found it? Why is my

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Breast so cold, my Love so weak, and my divine Desires so low and languishing? Why do they not bear a suitable Proportion to their amiable Object? How frozen, how stupid and insensible is my Heart? I have disclosed before it the Ineffable Beauties of Divine Goodness, yet how little does it feel their Energy and Influence? I display before it the Glory of Heaven and the transporting Pleasures of a blissful Immortality, but it continues hard and without Impression. I cry, I have discover'd an everlasting Treasure, a suitable and perfect Happiness, but it does not hear. I urge and press it with its Duty and Interest, but it perceives not the Force and Vertue of my Reasons; or if the Contemplation of boundless Perfections a little awakens it, if after much Patience and Labour it begins to stir, and the Divine Fire is a little kindled, yet it seems but a forced and a foreign Warmth; the Dead Thing quickly returns to its former Coldness and Insensibility, What shall I do to awaken my Lethargick Faculties? Tho' my Reason has condemned, yet it has not subdu'd my sensual Inclinations; in despite of all my Convictions they maintain a secret Interest within, and their Bias is still too strong and prevalent in my Heart; my corrupt and degenerate Propensions are the heavy Weight that hangs upon my Soul, and sinks its flight, when it would rise to Heaven. These are the powerful Charms, that have laid it so fast asleep. But how dead soever it is to my Reasonings, yet his glorious Voice, that rends the Rocks and shakes the Wilderness, will make it hear; how hard and insensible soever it remains after my Endeavours to soften it, yet at his Presence, before whom the Hills melt like Wax, it will surely dissolve: let that Voice command it, and it will obey. In the mean time, I cannot but condemn my self when I reflect on this wonderful Stupidity, that has seized upon me, while I perceive that I am forced to deliberate about loving the Supream Being, and want so many Reasons and Arguments to persuade me that infinite Goodness is worthy my intensest Affection.

MY Love to the Creatures outgoes and prevents my Reasoning: I need no Eloquence to convince me that Meat and Drink, Rest and Health are good and desirable things; and is not the blessed Creator as proper and suitable a Good for the Mind, as those are for the Body? And therefore is it not strange, that after I have used such clear and forcible Arguments, and urged and pressed them so long and earnestly

nessly upon my self, that my stubborn Heart should feel so little Efficacy and Vertue from them?

TO be more particular, would you reflect, Sir, that there is no Object in the World so suitable to the Understanding as the Divine Being, you would be perswaded to love him; you should therefore by the Contemplation of his Perfections displayed in his Works of Creation, Providence and Redemption, learn to know him in a practical Manner; that is, so to know him as to love him and chuse him as your ultimate Happiness; for this is the moral end of all Knowledge. What if a Man had the most clear and capacious Head, the most solid and piercing Judgment, the most retentive and regular Memory, the most lively Wit and fruitful Imagination, so that he could clearly comprehend all the Sciences of the Learned, account for all the perplexed Phenomena of Nature, unriddle the Difficulties of the Schools, penetrate the Mysteries and Intreagues of States and Governments, and was able to discourse on all these Subjects to the confusion of all Opposers, and the astonishment of all that heard him; were this to be Wise, whilst he knew not what is suitable to perfect his Faculties, supply his Wants, and make him happy? To know created Beings abstracted from their original, and their proper Use and Ends, is to know the Characters, but to be ignorant of their Sense and Meaning; unless the Understanding by a due Contemplation of the Deity has received just and suitable Impressions from his Glorious Attributes, all the Wit and Knowledge in the World is Folly and Stupidity. If this be a valuable Perfection, it is no more than the condemned Spirits themselves enjoy, whom however we abhor as the most vile and execrable Creatures. The Knowledge of Inferior Things is no farther desirable, than as they lead us to the Supreme Being; and we are to follow these Streams only that we may rise to the Fountain. To what Purpose should a Man know any Thing in Created Nature, but that he may know its Author better; and to what End should he know him, but that he may for ever love him, and by Loving him, be for ever happy? For it is not our Knowledge of Things, but our loving and enjoying their Goodness, in which our Felicity consists. You should therefore strive to gain such just and lively Conceptions of God's Merciful and Gracious Nature, and such clear and strong Representations of his boundless Love and Goodness,

as may make the deepest Impressions on your Mind, and by their quickening and powerful Influence produce such ardent Affections, as may not be extinguished: And by this Means your Mind will regain in a great Degree, its primitive Rectitude, and your Heart will adhere with a prevalent Inclination to this Beatifick Good, so natural, so agreeable and so proportioned to the Capacities and Powers of a Reasonable Nature.

SINCE then the Divine Being is the proper Object of the Understanding, employ, Sir, that superior Faculty of your Soul in a constant and lively Contemplation of his infinite Perfections; and especially meditate on his Relations to you, as your great Creator, Benefactor, Governor, and Ultimate End. Bespeak your self, Sir, in Words like these.

LET me look up and view stedfastly this Excellent and Eternal Being, the Possessor and Fountain of all Perfection, and the Maker of all Things, whose Power is unlimited, and whose Wisdom is unsearchable; who fills the Heavens with his Glory, and the Earth with his Goodness; whose Loving-Kindness endures for ever, and whose Mercies are over all his Works. This is indeed a suitable and worthy Object of our Contemplation: The Light of the Sun is not more proper and agreeable to the Eye, than the Light of this infinitely more Glorious Being is to the Understanding: It that scatters the Mists, removes the Night, and revives the World with Heat and Day, this does not less illuminate the Mind, chasing thence the infernal Darkness, which since *Adam's* Rebellion has dwelt upon it: Since that unhappy Hour, interposing Clouds have intercepted our Prospect of Heaven, and the Plague of *Egypt*, but more lasting and universal has befallen us: Sad State! Miserable World! How black are these Regions? How uncomfortable these impenetrable Shades? Sure this Place is the Vale of Tears and the Shadow of Death: 'Tis the Seat of Confusion and Disorder, and too closely borders on the Kingdom of Darkness; would I had some kind Beam to direct my Steps! How desirable is the least imperfect Day in so unlightsome and dangerous a Passage? How great a Favour had the *Israelites*, who enjoyed the chearful Light in their Dwellings, when so thick and gloomy Night covered all the Face of *Egypt*? And has now the God of *Israel* forgotten and deserted this sinful World? Is the

Sun of Righteousness for ever set to these unhappy Seats? Has he not still a peculiar People, and does he not continue to illuminate some excellent Minds? Happy Souls! Blest Favories of Heaven! You have Lustre in your Orbs, when all others are eclipsed. You find a welcome Day in the midst of Darkness, enjoy a clear Prospect of Heaven, and dwell in the Contemplation of the Father of Lights.

HOW earnestly I long for this Happiness! May some Celestial Beam break in upon my Mind, and dissipate the Clouds of Ignorance and Error, that hang upon it, that I may be able to look up to Heaven and view, admire and adore the eternal Spring of Bliss and Glory! When will this heavenly Day begin to dawn? When will the pure Light spring from on High to cheer and direct my involved and bewildered Mind? How refined, how clear, how agreeable, is this Divine Lustre, and what Pleasure is it to contemplate the Glorious Object whence it flows? How sweet are its Influences? It inlightens without raising Clouds, it warms without causing Corruption, and delights without weakening the Sight.

HOW happy are you, ye pure and perfect Spirits, who are admitted into the Courts of Heaven, who stand in your Maker's Presence, and are ravished to behold the Brightness of his Face? How clear a Day do you enjoy? How pleasant and serene are the Regions, where you live? You dwell so near the Source of Life and Light, that you must needs overflow with Glory, and shine like the Sun in its greatest Splendor. When *Moses* had staid but a few Days before God in the Mount, his Face had imbibed such a dazzling Lustre, that the astonished *Israelites* were not able to behold it. How bright then are those Godlike Spirits, that Day and Night worship before the Almighty's Throne? and how infinitely more will *Moses* shine at the Resurrection of the Just, than when he descended from the Mount?

LET me then awake and look up; let me with Veneration, Humility and profound Submission contemplate this adorable and blissful Being; let me view it so steadily, so constantly and so earnestly, that I may receive its bright Impression, and detain some Beams of Light intercepted by my Embraces. Let me forget the World, and gaze no longer on its gaudy Trifles, but turn my enquiring Thoughts and all the Force of my Under-

Understanding hither ; for this is an Object worthy to be known, that will entertain, satisfy and perfect all the Faculties of the Mind.

AND here I shall put an End to this Letter, which, if you desire it, shall be soon followed with another, where I shall shew that our Divine Author is no less the proper Object of the Will, than he is of the Understanding, and therefore the fittest to be loved with the strongest Inclination of the Heart. I shall likewise consider that part of your Letter, that relates to hurtful Conversation. *I am,*

S I R,

Your most humble Servant,

THEOPHILUS



The Third LETTER.

EUGENIO to THEOPHILUS.

S I R,

YOU have soon obliged me with an Answer to mine, in which I earnestly craved the Revival of your Christian Correspondence, which I find so necessary for my Instruction and Support ; and I return you most hearty Thanks for the Goodness and Benevolence you have shewn in your readiness to gratify my Desires. I am convinced that you have justly recommended to me the constant Exercise and Improvement of Divine Love, as the most proper and effectual Means of acquiring more prevalent Degrees of Piety, and a more steady and uniform Course of vertuous Actions. I see by the Lights, you have imparted to me, that this is the greatest moral Beauty and Perfection that can adorn and ennoble the Mind of Man ; that it is the leading Principle and the commanding Spring that sets in Motion the Faculties of

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the Soul in all her Religious Operations, affects the Heart with Worthy and Devout Emotions, and produces in the Life all moral Order and pious Works. This was in a less Measure my Belief before, but since I have read and contemplated your Instructive Discourse, my Ideas on this Divine and important Subject are much enlarged and more free from Obscurity. I can evidently discern from your Reasoning, that as this heavenly Principle does more or less get ground in the Soul, Religion and moral Goodness will in Proportion thrive or decline: When this pure Fountain is full and swells the Heart, the Waters of Life will flow constantly from it in plentiful Streams of Piety and Vertue, which must sink and languish, when they are defrauded of Supplies from the Spring-head. It is therefore my Resolution to cherish warm and devout Affections, and to use the proper Arguments and Incentives which you have suggested to me, or shall suggest, to excite and strengthen the active Principles of Divine Love; that I may feel more Alacrity and Fervour in Prayer, Meditation, Religious Discourses and all Sacred Exercises; and by this Means wear off the Deadness and Indisposition, that I often perceive in the Performance of Spiritual Duties. I have read over, more than once, and considered your pious Discourse, and have Reason to believe, that I shall reap from it great Benefit; and therefore entreat you to communicate your remaining Sentiments on this Subject and you will, highly oblige,

S I R,

Your most humble Servant,

EUGENIO.

The

The Fourth LETTER.

THEOPHILUS to EUGENIO.

I Observed, Sir, with great Satisfaction from your Answer to Mine, that my Discourse on Divine Love had made good Impressions on your Mind; and therefore according to my promise, and in compliance with your Request, you will here find some further Meditations on that great Subject.

I N my last, Sir, I represented to you the Divine Being as the most excellent and most proper Object of humane Understanding, and therefore the fittest to be contemplated, and the most worthy to be adored. I shall now endeavour to shew, that he is the only suitable Object of the Will, and therefore the fittest to be loved.

O UR Divine Author, God blessed for ever, who alone is endowed with boundless Goodness, is only capable of gratifying all the Desires of Men, and filling up all the Compass of the Soul: And as his Goodness is real, suitable and commensurate to our Wishes and Capacities, so is it permanent and unchangeable, and admits no Diminution, Interruption or Cessation: And as it is lasting and immortal as our Souls, so is it pure and unblemished by any foreign or noxious Mixture, and therefore will fully answer the Expectations of the Possessor. But on the other Hand, the Powers, Profits, and Pleasures of this Life, are empty Illusions, beautiful Vapours and unsubstantial Appearances, that cheat our Imaginations, disappoint our Hopes, and often fill us with Shame and Regret. If we will be instructed by our own, or convinced by the Experience of Mankind in all Countries and Ages, we may look on it as certain, that no worldly Enjoyments here can afford the Mind of Man any rational, sincere and solid Satisfaction; and it is most evident that hereafter they are intirely useless: They cannot relieve our Fears, and support our Spirits in the Pangs of Death, or go down with us to the Grave, and accompany us in our Passage into the coming unseen World; they cannot open to us the Door of Heaven, and introduce us into the Glorious Assembly of Saints and Angels, bless us

with the Fruition of the Divine Being, and fill our Souls with ineffable, pure and immortal Joys ; nor can they reconcile our offended omnipotent Judge, or disarm him of his Vengeance, or comfort us in the Courts of Death, where are constant Howlings of Grief, and Yellings of Despair, Weeping and Wailing and gnashing of Teeth. Since therefore they cannot serve and stand by us in any of these important Cases, it is evident that the Object of the worldly Man's ardent Affections and eager Pursuits is really an idle, useless and insignificant Thing. And as the Profits and Pleasures here below are by no means substantial and solid Satisfaction, so neither are they durable and permanent ; they themselves do often take Wings and fly away, and often with Change of Age we change our Taste, and tho' the Object remains, our relish of it is gone ; and as often through the Fickleness and capricious Inconstancy of our Temper, that is tired with Familiarity, and always pursues Variety of Enjoyments, we grow weary of that which not long before we esteemed our Happiness.

BUT could we always enjoy the Things of this World with unintermitting Pleasure thro' all the Stages of Life, yet how soon will those be passed over ? How swift are the Wings of Time ? How fast do our Years run their Race, and how soon will the Grave receive and shut her Mouth upon her expected Guest ? And how can such short-lived, fugitive Things be a proper and suitable Good for an Immortal Being, which he must part with in so short a Time, and shall enjoy them no more to all the Ages of Eternity ? Nor could a Man ever dream of Felicity in the Fruition of worldly Objects, if he reflected how unsuitable and disproportioned they are to a conscious Intellectual Nature, whose noble Faculties and Capacities demand higher and more excellent Pleasures, than those which arise from the Fruition of Wealth and Power and the Gratification of Corporeal Inclinations.

BESIDES, the Objects of Sense are not equal or proportioned to our Wants, nor sufficient to make the Possessor happy. If they please some few of our Desires, and give us some less valuable Satisfaction, they leave many Appetites unprovided for, and many great Sufferings unremoved. How many, who enjoy a plentiful Fortune, Popularity and Power, and are esteemed and envied by their Neighbours as happy Men, are notwithstanding by their own querulous and uneasy Tem-

per, or their inward guilty Fears, by the Disobedience and ill Courses of bad Children, or the untimely Death of good Ones, and by a Thousand Domestick Stings and Thorns concealed from the Observation of others, justly numbered among the Miserable? And were their secret Sufferings and Anxieties disclosed to the World, they would, far from being envied, become the Object of Pity.

IT is therefore most certain that the Possessions of this World, let them be ever so great and many, will fall infinitely short of giving us compleat and lasting Satisfaction; and whosoever sets his Heart and Affections on these low and transient Things, and chuses and pursues them as his chief Good, will find himself fatally deluded and disappointed.

AND now, Sir, let the following Expostulations have their due Weight and Influence on your Mind. Consider that God has an uncontested Claim to your Affections, as he is your Divine Author, and as he is endow'd with the most amiable Perfections and is the sole Felicity of a Reasonable Creature. If you refuse to love your Maker, whom you were made to love, what will you do with your Intellectual Faculties? On what other Objects, as an equal and suitable Good, can you exercise and employ them? If you love not the Divine Being, why do you desire the continuance of an unprofitable and useless Existence? Surely there is some End appropriated to a humane Being, something that his excellent Capacities were designed for; and what is it, which Reason can suggest, unless it be this Divine Life of loving and enjoying his Creator? There is nothing besides, that is worth his living for: Were it not for this, Men need not desire their Reasonable Souls or elevated Faculties any longer, as having no use or employment for them; and in this view their continuance here becoming wholly idle and impertinent, they should rather chuse to Die and give up their Being, than to Live uneasy and in Pain for want of suitable Exercise and Employment; and much more desirable were it not to Be, than to oppose and obstruct the End in relation to which all the Goodness and Usefulness of their Being does consist. Not to love our Divine Author, is to hate him, and become his Enemy; and can any thing be more detestable? Should any Man desire to be such a deformed and monstrous Creature, and were it not better to have no Soul, than one so impure and odious, so unlike the Blest Inhabitants of Heaven, and so much re-

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sembling the malignant infernal Spirits? If the Sun, instead of illuminating, should cover the World with Darkness; or the Earth, instead of wholesome Herbs, Fruits and Flowers, should only bring forth poisonous Plants, and instead of innocent and profitable Herbs, should nourish only venomous and ravening Beasts, what a dismal Place would this World become? What Amazement and Horror does the bare imaginary Representation of such Disorder and Confusion raise within us? Why then do not degenerate and flagitious Men start back upon themselves, and recoil affrighted, when they reflect upon their foul Deformity? For while they do not love and obey the Divine Being, they resist and oppose the End of their Creation, as much as it is possible for the Creatures before named to do, and must therefore become hateful and monstrous, the just Objects of Wonder and Detestation.

H O W miserable is the State of those Men, who are estranged from their Divine Author, and find their Affections alienated from the Fountain of all Felicity? Were it not better to lie putrifying in the Grave, than to have a Body animated by such an impure and odious Mind? Surely this State is worse than Death, and the King of Terrors is a harmless Thing compared with such a Misery as this. What a Heaven of Pleasure do these Men lose? What Transports of Delight might they, if they pleased, possess; that is, if they would devote their Hearts to the Supream Being, which were made to love him? Inestimable Loss, that all the Glories and Treasures of the World are never able to recompence! Prodigious Stupidity! How can any Men please themselves in so sad a Condition, while they pervert their Faculties from their proper End? What Weight has pressed down their Minds, and what Violence turned the Inclinations of such Spiritual Beings from ascending to Heaven? What secret Chains have fettered them to the Earth, when their Place of Rest is evidently Above? Whence comes it that they do not struggle and contend to disengage themselves from all Impediments, that they may rise to the Seats above, their Home and Center? How wonderful is it that after they are fully convinced that they are certainly misplaced, and that nothing below is worthy of their Love and Delight, that they do not quit the Earth with Scorn and Disdain, and ascend to the Regions of Peace and Light with the most vigorous Efforts of Affection and Desire? These Minds have been Strangers so
long.

long, that they have forgotten their Home ; they have so long embraced and grovell'd on the Earth, that they have imbibed an earthly Tincture ; and have been so much inured to corporeal Pleasures, that they are grown altogether sensual : They have been so long debased to servile and vile Employments, that they remember not their Divine Original, and the Delights and Dignity to which they are born. The Greatness and Generosity of their Nature is lost, and they are fallen in Love with Chains and Slavery, and the base Tasks to which they have been so long prostituted. Strange that they cannot be perswaded to quit their Prisons, and exchange the coarse and unworthy Satisfactions of Sense, for the pure and ravishing Joys of the Blessed in Heaven !

Y O U should pity, *Sir*, the unhappy State of these Men, and strive Day and Night to be delivered from so sad a Condition ; you should always labour not only to keep alive, but to strengthen and improve the Principle of Divine Love in your Heart ; and in order to this, entertain your self sometimes with this Soliloquy.

I T is with Shame and Remorse that I reflect how, after I have represented to my Mind in the most lively and moving Manner the excellent and most amiable Perfections of the Divine Being, I continued so indifferent and unaffected ? Is it not wonderful beyond Expression, that after I have contemplated infinite Love and ineffable Goodness, I should feel no more its attractive Force ? I see this with Astonishment, and lament it with Sorrow and Confusion ; I upbraid and detest my self for this Stupidity and Ingratitude, but cannot change my degenerate Nature. I know that God is the most amiable Being in the World, that he is my only End and Felicity, and would fain love him with the whole Force and Inclination of my Mind, but I cannot attain my Wish ; the sensual Bias is too prevalent within to suffer such a happy Condition. What shall I do to remove this Insensibility, and extirpate these corrupt Dispositions, that so much obstruct my Improvement in Piety ? How shall I shake off this heavy Weight, and extinguish my evil Propensions, that my Heart may know no other Flames than those of Divine Love, and relish no other Delights but those that flow from the Contemplation of my great Creator ? Give me this Desire, and let others have all the Pleasures that can be found on Earth ; let me gain this Happiness, and let those have the World, who have it for their Portion.

BUT if this desirable Condition is not to be obtained on Earth, yet is it surely to be enjoyed in Heaven; and what this World denies, the other will certainly afford. If these Regions lie too low to receive Celestial Influences in such a Measure as I want and wish; if a Mind immersed in a Mould of Earth, and obstructed by the Remains of unmortified Corruption, is not capable of such divine Perfection; yet when it shall be divested of this Body of Flesh and Sin together, and this Mortal shall put on Immortality, then shall my Happiness be compleated, and this Spark of Love shall break out and spread into everlasting Glory. Then my Desires shall be fully satisfied, when I love God perfectly and for Ever. The Presence of the glorious Object will then supercede the use of these Arguments and Meditations, which are now so necessary to excite my devout Passions; I shall then more nearly contemplate the Divine Being, and see him as he is; as he is to those, whom he has purchased to himself by the Death of his Son, and has received into his Kingdom to reign with him for ever. I shall then have no more unjust Ideas and harsh Apprehensions of his Nature, while his Purity and Justice will be no less amiable than his Mercy and Benevolence; nor will any uneasy Sense of Guilt or Fears of his Displeasure check or interrupt the Operations of my Love. I shall be there where my Head and Saviour is, to behold his Glory, the highest Example and Argument of Love which the World ever knew, and I can easily believe that in his Presence I shall not forbear to love him; I shall be joined to the Heavenly Choir of Saints and Angels, that are all pure Light and Love, and in this Sense too are made a Flame of Fire; and in such blessed Company I can readily conceive my Heart will not be cold and unconcerned. I shall then have no Allurements of Sense to entice or ensnare my Soul; and if any worldly Delights could be presented to me, I should have no more Taste and Relish of them; all the Impediments of my Love will be then removed, and all the Goodness and Glory of Heaven will be disclosed, to excite and entertain it for ever.

Tho' I cannot yet enjoy this Blessedness, yet I may thirst and long after it. I may lay hold on it by my ardent Desires and delightful Hopes, and from the Fore-thoughts of it may derive such Comfort and Satisfaction, as will sweeten my Life, and Support me under all the Difficulties and Hardships, to which I am here exposed. When a few

more Days are gone, all my Pains and Sufferings will be removed, and I shall be admitted into the pure and glorious Assembly of the Blest, where I shall possess my Felicity, and adhere to infinite Goodness with inseperable Embraces. How fast do the fleeting Hours pass away, as if they comply'd with my impatient Desires, and made haste to give me the Happiness I long for? Patience hold, it is but a little Time and I shall certainly attain what I earnestly seek, the perfect Love and Fruition of Eternal Good.

I N the mean time let me live as a Stranger here; let me look up to Heaven, and long to be received into the Habitations of Joy and Bliss; let my Thoughts, my Hopes and Conversation be Above, and let me feel the constant Efforts of Divine Love always tending and striving Upwards. The Unkindness of this World will be useful to quicken my Desires, and make me hasten my Preparations; but if it entices me with its Smiles, which are far more dangerous than its Frowns, may I reject its flattering Courtship, and despise all its treacherous Favours. Tho' I cannot reach that perfect Happiness which I desire, yet let me take my Farewel of these transient worldly Delights; let me disengage my Affections from sensual Objects, that are apt to indispose and unfit me for this heavenly Exercise of loving God, and weaken my relish of spiritual Pleasures. Tho' I know that the Corruptions of the Mind, as well as the Fabrick and Temperament of the Body, will not bear the highest and most refined Operations of this celestial Principle, yet will they bear far greater than mine; let me therefore use my utmost Care and Diligence to raise it to as high a Degree as this mortal and imperfect State will admit: And to that End, let me diligently use the most proper and most powerful Incentives; let me approach my Divine Author in his holy Ordinances, and with a Heart prepared by hungering and earnest Desires, frequent the Places where the Graces and Influences of his Spirit are dispensed in the greatest Abundance. May I dwell in the constant Contemplation of his Goodness and Mercy, and view all the Riches and Treasures of his Love, with a fix'd and steady Observation. It will be impossible to know him, and not to love him; to contemplate always his amiable Excellencies, and not feel some suitable Impressions. The most fixed and hardest Metals dissolve in a constant Fire, and the continual Presence of a lovely Object will not fail to wear off any unjust and

and preconceived Aversion. Acquaintance and Familiarity with our Friends preserve and encrease our Affection, which Distance and Estrangeness too often weaken or quite extinguish. To be always near the Fountain of Good, and constantly to consider his gracious Nature and glorious Attributes, will surely be an efficacious Means to excite my Love ; only the blind or too remote can escape the Force and Influence of divine and infinite Perfection.

BESIDES, *Sir*, you should incessantly implore the Aid and Assistance of the Holy Spirit of Love ; that he would descend from Heaven on you, as on the Apostles formerly in Fire, and enter your Heart like a rushing Wind, to blow up your kindling Affection, till it becomes a bright and vigorous Flame. That he would constantly dwell within you, to subdue all sensual and irregular Appetites ; inspire you with this divine Passion, reinforce your pious Resolutions, awaken you when you grow careless, and animate and guide you by his holy Motions. Pray earnestly that his sacred Influence may never desert you, without which you can no more exert the Operations of Divine Love, than your Body can live when your Soul is gone, or the Earth bring forth Fruit without the Heat of the Sun.

AND now, *Sir*, in answer to that part of your Letter, in which you complain of your Unhappiness in respect of your Neighbouring Gentlemen, who, as you say, are generally Immoral or Prophane, which is likewise, as I am informed, the sad Condition of most Countries, where Persons of Birth and Estates, and what is more surprizing and deplorable many of the Magistrates themselves, are over-run with Vice and Impiety ; and with how ill a Grace must Men in Power condemn Criminals for breaking the Laws of God or Man, when by so doing they involve themselves in the same Condemnation, and punish their Neighbours for the Crimes of which themselves are notoriously guilty ? This, I say, is a very melancholly Reflection, and is an undeniable Argument of the prodigious Decay of Religion, and Sobriety of Life, in this Nation. This shews that our Vertue is laid waste and desolate ; and such an universal Degeneracy and Corruption of Manners, such Contempt, Hatred and Derision of Piety and pious Men, must expose us to divine Wrath and Displeasure, till the Almighty, who has interposed by a long Train of Miracles of Providence, to preserve our Kingdom, enough to astonish

all that reflect upon them, and to convince the most atheistical Men that surely there is a God that governs the World, is at last provoked to forsake an ungrateful and obdurate People; and give them up as incorrigible to the terrible Consequences and Effects of their flagrant Vices and prophane Defiance of Heaven; of their unchristian Divisions, Strife and Contention; their insatiable Avarice, Pride and Ambition; which must unavoidably at length bring Destruction on a profligate People; who, instead of being reclaimed and amended by wonderful Mercies, and repeated Deliverances, shall scoff at Religion, deride the Justice, abuse the Goodness, and trifle with the Patience of their great Creator. But to return to your particular Case; you complain that you are surrounded with dissolute and irreligious Gentlemen, and that therefore you cannot enjoy the Conversation of your Equals, but to your great Cost. I advise you therefore to frequent the Company of sincere Christians, tho' much inferior to your self in Birth, Education and Possessions; it is very probable you may find some of this Character among the meaner sort of People, who have a good Understanding, and are warm, serious and confirmed Christians. Value, Sir, love and embrace such Persons; for believe it, the moral Image of God upon them, and the Marks of sincere Goodness, ennoble and distinguish this lower Rank of Men, more than Diadems, Stars and Garters can exalt the Possessors of Them. What are Power, Pomp and Wealth compared with Celestial Piety? This is an infinitely more valuable Honour, than that of Titles and all the Ensigns of worldly Greatness. Will you not carelessly and take into your Bosom those, whom Abraham will receive into his? The Saints were the excellent of the Earth, whom the great and good King David made his Delight, and such are more frequently found in mean Habitations, and in a private humble State of Life, than in splendid Palaces and the Assemblies of the Rich and Mighty. In Imitation of him, take Pleasure in the Company of pious and upright Men, tho' of mean Condition; visit them with Courtesy and Kindness, invite them to your House, and sometimes receive them at your Table. And can your Self-denial and Condescension be censured in doing so, when you only entertain and grow familiar with those, who when all worldly Distinctions cease, which soon they will in another Life, these obscure, but honest and pious Men, tho' now neglected, may equal and perhaps

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satisfy your self, and many other Professions of Religion of great Character, in Bliss and immortal Glory. Nor will you only by this means escape the displeasing and noxious Conversation of the loose and profligate, as well as that of the worldly and avaricious; but the Company of some of these Men of inferior Fortunes, tho' perhaps of superior Goodness, may be conducive to your Growth in Piety and Improvement in Divine Love. But however, may you never delight in those Men, whose worldly and evil Conversation insensibly steals your Heart from Heaven, damps your Divine Passions, and infects you with their own Lifeless and Lethargick Disposition. It is not probable that you should love God, while you please your self with the Company of his Enemies; what Assistance are you likely to receive from Discourses of Wealth and Honour, Houses and Lands, Plays and Pastimes, to awaken your drowsy Heart, and inflame it with Love to God? Reflect how often your better Temper and Disposition of Mind, procured with great Pains and Difficulty, has been utterly broken in the Assemblies of such Persons; and how you have returned with shame to lament and repair your great Loss: How much sweeter is it to live in Silence and Solitude, than to purchase the Pleasures of Conversation at so dear a Rate?

In prosecution, Sir, of the Province you have set me, I have thus proceeded in making such further Practical Reflections, as seem to me naturally to arise from this Divine Subject. You will observe in this Discourse, that I have not entered into any accurate and Philosophical Examination of the Nature of the Passions: I have given no definition of Love, Desire or Joy, and I must own I have industriously declined it; and my Reason is, that Love, Desire, Joy, like Light, Moisture, Hunger and the like, are better known by their bare Sound, than by the most learned Definition; that is, we have in our Minds as full, clear and distinct Ideas of what is meant by those Words, when we hear them named alone, as when they are explained, and defined in the most Scholastick Manner; and it being my purpose rather to excite Divine Love, than to define it, I have avoided those Speculations, that I judged would rather embarrass the Discourse, than promote the Design of it. I make no Apology for the Repetitions, nor for the Redundancy arising from different Turns and new Forms of Expression; when we would excite the Affections, and warm the Heart, Luxuriancy is to

be preferred before Correctness and laboured Accuracy, which render the Style so cold and dry, that it is unable to raise any Emotion, to touch the Passions, and go Home to the Heart. If I have not already quite tired you, I shall speedily send you another Letter on this Divine Subject.

I am, S I R,

With the greatest Respect,

Your humble Servant,

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THEOPHILUS



Letters of Religion.

be preferred before Corruptions and laboured Accusations, which tends
the Scale to cold and dry, that it is unable to raise any Emotion, to
touch the Passions, and go Home to the Heart. If I have not already
done tired you, I shall readily send you another Letter of this Divine
Subject.

1721, 21st.

With the greatest Respect,

Your humble Servant,

THEOPHILUS

